

# **Adult Learning and Instructor Competencies**

**Update: February 2004**

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## Lesson Administration Page

**Module:** Adult Learning and Instructor Competencies

**Scope:** This module introduces the student to the principles of adult learning; it contrasts the juvenile/adolescent and adult learning environments through the concepts contained in Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning. The student is familiarized with the competencies expected of an adult learning instructor.

**Instruction Objective(s):**

Terminal Learning Objective: At the conclusion of this module, the student will describe the domains of learning, the principles of adult learning, and the competencies required of an instructor in the adult learning environment.

Enabling Learning Objective 1: Discuss adult learning theory, including the domains of Bloom's Taxonomy

Enabling Learning Objective 2: Describe barriers and motivation of adult students

Enabling Learning Objective 3: Identify major needs of adult students

Enabling Learning Objective 4: Identify and describe collaborative learning and relate the effect of the process to adult learning

Enabling Learning Objective 5: Identify and describe the competencies required of an adult learning instructor and discuss why the competencies are important in the adult learning environment

Enabling Learning Objective 6: Describe learning tips for effective instructors, including treatment of adult students

Enabling Learning Objective 7: Describe the role of an instructor as a leader

Enabling Learning Objective 8: Describe and discuss ethical considerations of instructors

**Practical Exercise:** None

**References:**

- Cross, K.P. (1981). *Adults as Students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Benjamin S. Bloom, Bertram B. Mesia, and David R. Krathwohl (1964). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (two Vols: The Affective Domain & The Cognitive Domain). New York. David McKay.
- Elias, J., and Merriam, S. *Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education*. Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1980.
- MacGregor, J. "Collaborative Learning: Shared Inquiry as a Process of Reform." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. No. 42 (Summer 1990).
- Martin, T. P. "Collaborative Learning, Circa 1880." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, MA, April 1990.
- Heaney, T. "Resources for Popular Education." *Adult Learning*. Vol. 3, No. 5 (February 1992).
- *Webster's II New College Dictionary*. (2001) Houghton Mifflin Company, New York.
- Samford Problem Based Learning Initiative  
(<http://sll.stanford.edu/pubs/jeepark/pblsite/skipintro.htm>) 2002.

**Duration:** 1.0 hours (NOTE: Time may be adjusted to meet objectives)

**Method of Instruction:** Facilitated seminar in classroom environment with practical exercises

**Instructor Ratio:** 1:40 or 1:8

**Required Reading Assignments:** *Adult Learning and Instructor Competencies* module

**Evaluation Strategy:** End of course 30-question written examination and oral presentations

## Adult Learning

Despite adult learning being a relatively new area of study, great strides have been made toward understanding how adults learn. Although more remains to be discovered, much knowledge exists to guide the design and teaching of courses for adult students. Part of being an effective instructor involves understanding how adults learn best. When addressing adult students, certain assumptions can be made:

- *Adults are goal-oriented*—Upon enrolling in a course, adult students usually know what goal they want to achieve. Therefore, they appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements. Instructors must show students how this class will help them attain their goals. This classification of goals and course objectives must be done early in the course.
- *Adults are relevancy-oriented*—They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. Therefore, instructors must identify objectives for adult students before the course begins. This also means that theories and concepts must be related to a setting familiar to students. Letting students choose projects that reflect their own interests can fulfill this need.
- *Adults are practical*—Adults focus on the aspects of a lesson that are most useful to them in their work: *they may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake*. Instructors must tell students explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.

As people mature, they usually become more autonomous and self-directed, needing to be free to direct themselves. Their instructors must actively involve adult students in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them. Specifically, they must discover students' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests. They should:

- allow the students to assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership
- act as facilitators, guiding students to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts
- show students how the class will help them reach their goals

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## Notes

Adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base. To help them do so, instructors should:

- draw out students' relevant experience and knowledge
- relate theories and concepts to the students and recognize the value of experience in learning

As with all students, adults need to be shown *respect*. Instructors must acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult students bring to the classroom. These adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge and should also be allowed to voice their opinions freely in class.

Support for adult students is provided through a learning environment that meets both their physical and psychological needs. Such a learning environment is also an essential element in successful partnerships between students and instructors. Developing an atmosphere in which adults feel both safe and challenged should be the goal. Any anxieties students might have about appearing foolish or exposing themselves to failure should be eased—but they should not feel so safe that they do not question their current assumptions or are not challenged in other ways. Instructors need to balance being friendly with challenging students. An ideal adult learning climate has a non-threatening, nonjudgmental atmosphere in which adults have permission for and are expected to share in the responsibility for their learning.

## Learning Domains of Bloom's Taxonomy

In 1956, Dr. Benjamin Bloom (University of Chicago) headed a group of educational psychologists in developing a classification of levels of intellectual behavior that are important in learning processes. This became a taxonomy including three overlapping domains; the *cognitive*, *affective*, and *psychomotor*. This compilation divides the three domains into subdivisions, starting from the simplest behavior to the most complex. The divisions outlined are not absolutes and there are other systems or hierarchies that have been devised in the educational and training world. However, Bloom's taxonomy is easily understood and is probably the most widely applied taxonomy in use today.

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## Notes

Domains can be thought of as categories. Cognitive is for mental skills (knowledge), affective is for growth in feelings or emotional areas (attitude), while psychomotor is for manual or physical abilities (skills). This taxonomy of learning behaviors can be thought of as “the goals of the training process.” That is, after the training session, the student should have acquired these new skills, knowledge, or attitudes.

## Cognitive

The cognitive domain involves knowledge and the development of intellectual skills. This includes the recollection or recognition of specific facts, procedural patterns, and concepts that serve in the development of intellectual abilities and skills. Following are six major categories, listed in order, starting from the simplest behavior to the most complex. The categories can be thought of as building blocks—that is, the first one must be mastered before the next one can take place.

- *Knowledge*—Recollection of data.
  - *Examples*—Reciting a policy; quoting prices from memory to a customer; knowing the safety rules
  - *Key Words*—Defining, describing, identifying, knowing, labels, listing, matching, naming, outlining, recalling, recognizing, reproducing, selecting, stating
- *Comprehension*—Understanding the meaning, translation, interpolation, and interpretation of instructions and problems; stating a problem in one’s own words
  - *Examples*—Rewriting the principles of test writing; explaining in one’s own words the steps for performing a complex task; translating an equation into a computer spreadsheet
  - *Key Words*—Comprehending, converting, defending, distinguishing, estimating, explaining, extending, generalizing, giving examples, inferring, interpreting, paraphrasing, predicting, rewriting, summarizing, translating

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## Notes

- *Application*—Using a concept in a new situation or unprompted use of an idea; applying what was learned in the classroom into new situations in the workplace
  - *Examples*—Using a manual to calculate an employee’s vacation time; applying laws of statistics to evaluate the reliability of a written test
  - *Key Words*—Applying, changing, computing, constructing, demonstrating, discovering, manipulating, modifying, operating, predicting, preparing, producing, relating, showing, solving, using
- *Analysis*—Separating material or concepts into component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood; distinguishing between facts and inferences
  - *Examples*—Troubleshooting a piece of equipment by using logical deduction; recognizing logical fallacies in reasoning; gathering information from a department and selecting the required tasks for training
  - *Key Words*—Analyzing, breaking down, comparing, contrasting, diagramming, deconstructing, differentiating, discriminating, distinguishing, identifying, illustrating, inferring, outlining, relating, selecting, separating
- *Synthesis*—Building a structure or pattern from diverse elements; putting parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure
  - *Examples*—Writing a company operations or process manual; designing a machine to perform a specific task; integrating training from several sources to solve a problem; revising a process to improve the outcome
  - *Key Words*—Categorizing, combining, compiling, composing, creating, devising, designing, explaining, generating, modifying, organizing, planning, rearranging, reconstructing, relating, reorganizing, revising, rewriting, summarizing, telling, writing

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## Notes



- *Evaluation*—Making judgments about the value of ideas or materials
  - *Examples*—Selecting the most effective solution; hiring the most qualified candidate; explaining and justifying a new budget
  - *Key Words*—appraising, comparing, concluding, contrasting, criticizing, critiquing, defending, describing, discriminating, evaluating, explaining, interpreting, justifying, relates, summarizing, supporting

## Affective

This domain includes the manner in which things are dealt with emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes. There five major categories (listed in order):

- *Receiving phenomena*—Awareness, willingness to hear, selected attention
  - *Examples*—Listening to others with respect; listening for and remembering the name of newly introduced people
  - *Key Words*—Asking, choosing, describing, following, giving, holding, identifying, locating, naming, pointing to, selecting, sitting, erecting, replying, using
- *Responding to phenomena*—Active participation on the part of the students; attending and reacting to a particular phenomenon; learning outcomes may emphasize compliance in responding, willingness to respond, or satisfaction in responding (motivation)
  - *Examples*—Participating in class discussions; giving a presentation; questioning new ideals, concepts, models, etc. in order to fully understand them; knowing the safety rules and practicing them
  - *Key Words*—Answer, assist, aid, comply, conform, discuss, greet, help, label, perform, practice, present, read, recite, report, select, tell, and write

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## Notes

- *Valuing*—The worth or value a person attaches to a particular object, phenomenon, or behavior. This ranges from simple acceptance to the more complex state of commitment. Valuing is based on the internalization of a set of specified values, while clues to these values are expressed in the student's overt behavior and are often identifiable.
  - *Examples*—Demonstrating belief in the democratic process; being sensitive towards individual and cultural differences (value diversity); showing the ability to solve problems; proposing a plan to social improvement and following through with commitment; informing management of matters about which one feels strongly
  - *Key Words*—Completing, demonstrating, differentiating, explaining, following, forming, initiating, inviting, joining, justifying, proposing, reading, reporting, selecting, sharing, studying, and working
- *Organization*—Organizing values into priorities by contrasting different values, resolving conflicts between them, and creating a unique value system. The emphasis is on comparing, relating, and synthesizing values.
  - *Examples*—Recognizing the need for balance between freedom and responsible behavior; accept responsibility for one's own behavior; explain the role of systematic planning in solving problems; accept professional ethical standards; create a life plan in harmony with abilities, interests, and beliefs; prioritizing time effectively to meet the needs of the organization, family, and self
  - *Key Words*—Adhering, altering, arranging, combining, comparing, completing, defending, explaining, formulating, generalizing, identifying, integrating, modifying, ordering, organizing, preparing, relating, and synthesizing

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## Notes

- *Internalizing values (characterization)*—Having a value system that controls one's behavior; the behavior is pervasive, consistent, predictable, and most importantly, characteristic of the student. Instructional objectives are concerned with the student's general patterns of adjustment (personal, social, and emotional).
  - *Examples*—Showing self-reliance when working independently; cooperating in group activities (displays teamwork); use an objective approach in problem solving; displays a professional commitment to ethical practice on a daily basis; revises judgments and changes behavior in light of new evidence; values people for what they are, not how they look
  - *Key Words*—Acts, discriminate, display, influence, listen, modify, perform, practice, propose, qualify, question, revise, serve, solve, and verify

## Psychomotor

The psychomotor domain includes physical movement, coordination, and use of the motor-skill areas. Development of these skills requires practice and is measured in terms of speed, precision, distance, procedures, or techniques in execution. There are seven major categories (listed in order):

- *Perception*—The ability to use sensory cues to guide motor activity; this ranges from sensory stimulation, through cue selection, to translation
  - *Examples*—Detecting non-verbal communication cues; estimating where a ball will land after it is thrown and then moving to the correct location to catch the ball; adjusting heat of stove to correct temperature by smell and taste of food; adjusting the height of the forks on a forklift by comparing where the forks are in relation to the pallet
  - *Key Words*—Choosing, describing, detecting, differentiating, distinguishing, identifying, isolating, relating, and selecting
- *Set*—Readiness to act. It includes mental, physical, and emotional sets; these three sets are dispositions that predetermine a person's response to different situations (sometimes called mindsets)
  - *Examples*—Knowing and acting upon a sequence of steps in a manufacturing process; recognizing one's abilities and limitations; showing desire to learn a new process (motivation)

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## Notes

**NOTE:** This subdivision of psychomotor is closely related with the “responding to phenomena” subdivision of the affective domain.

- *Key Words*—Beginning, displaying, explaining, moving, proceeding, reacting, showing, stating, volunteering
- *Guided response*—The early stages in learning a complex skill, including imitation and trial and error; adequacy of performance is achieved by practicing
  - *Examples*—Performing a mathematical equation as demonstrated; following instructions to build a model; responding to hand-signals of instructor while learning to operate a forklift
  - *Key Words*—Copying, tracing, following, reacting, reproducing, responding
- *Mechanism*—This is the intermediate stage in learning a complex skill. Learned responses have become habitual and the movements can be performed with some confidence and proficiency
  - *Examples*—Using a personal computer; repairing a leaking faucet; driving a car
  - *Key Words*—Assembling, calibrating, constructing, dismantling, displaying, fastening, fixing, grinding, heating, manipulating, measuring, mending, mixing, organizing, and sketching
- *Complex Overt Response*—The skillful performance of motor acts that involve complex movement patterns; proficiency is indicated by a quick, accurate, and highly coordinated performance, requiring a minimum of energy. This category includes performing without hesitation and automatic performance. For example, athletes often utter sounds of satisfaction or expletives as soon as they hit a tennis ball or throw a football because they can tell by the feel of the act what the result will produce.
  - *Examples*—Maneuvering a car into a tight parallel parking spot; operating a computer quickly and accurately; displaying competence while playing the piano
  - *Key Words*—Assembling, building, calibrating, constructing, dismantling, displaying, fastening, fixing, grinding, heating, manipulating, measuring, mending, mixing, organizing, and sketching

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## Notes

**NOTE:** The key words are the same as mechanism, but will have adverbs or adjectives that indicate that the performance is quicker, better, more accurate, etc.

- *Adaptation*—Skills are well developed and the individual can modify movement patterns to fit special requirements.
  - *Examples*—Respond effectively to unexpected experiences; modify instruction to meet the needs of the students; performing a task with a machine that it was not originally intended to do (machine is not damaged and there is no danger in performing the new task)
  - *Key Words*—Adapting, altering, changing, rearranging, reorganizing, revising, and varying
- *Origination*—Creating new movement patterns to fit a particular situation or specific problem. Learning outcomes emphasize creativity based upon highly developed skills.
  - *Examples*—Constructing a new theory; developing a new and comprehensive training program; create a new gymnastic routine
  - *Key Word*—Arranging, building, combining, composing, constructing, creating, designing, initiating, making, and originating

## Barriers and Motivation

Adults have many responsibilities that they must balance against the demands of learning. Because of these responsibilities, some adults are confronted with barriers that produce difficulties in learning participation. Some of these barriers may include:

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|----------------|--|
| • lack of time | • information about learning opportunities |
| • money        | • scheduling                               |
| • confidence   | • child care                               |
| • interest     | • transportation                           |

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## Notes

Another aspect of adult learning is motivation. *At least* six factors serve as sources of motivation for adult learning:

- *Social relationships*—Making new friends; meeting a need for associations and friendships
- *External expectations*—Complying with instructions from someone else; fulfilling the expectations or recommendations of someone with formal authority
- *Social welfare*—Improving ability to serve mankind; preparing for service to the community; improving ability to participate in community work
- *Personal advancement*—Achieving higher status in a job; securing professional advancement; and staying abreast of competitors
- *Escape/Stimulation*—Relieving boredom, providing a break in the routine of home or work; Providing a contrast to other exacting details of life
- *Cognitive interest*—Learning for the sake of learning; seeking knowledge for its own sake; satisfying an inquiring mind

What motivates adult students? Typical motivations include a requirement for competence or licensing, an expected (or realized) promotion, job enrichment, a need to maintain old skills or learn new ones, a need to adapt to job changes, or the need to learn in order to comply with company directives.

The best way to motivate adult students is simply to *enhance* their reasons for enrolling and *decrease* the barriers. Instructors must learn why their students are enrolled (the motivators); they must discover what is inhibiting their learning (the barriers). Then instructors must plan their motivating strategies: a successful strategy includes showing adult students the relationship between training and an expected promotion.

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## Notes

## Major Needs of Adult Students

An effective trainer must understand the major needs of adult students and how these needs impact the training environment:

- *Educational Needs*—An educational need is the difference between what the student does or knows and why he or she needs to know or do it.
- *Felt Needs*—Felt needs are those identified by the student. Felt needs are the most valuable to the instructor because they are very strong motivators.
- *Ascribed Needs*—Ascribed needs are developed through observation. The observer identifies and details the discrepancy between the exhibited behavior and the desired behavior.
- *Real Needs*—The gap existing between present performance and desired performance is referred to as a real need. Real needs are determined by multiple forms of input and may be ascribed or felt.
- *Symptomatic Educational Needs*—Symptomatic needs provide clues to the identification of real needs. For example, an illiterate adult may confuse the manifestation of a need such as the inability to fill out employment applications with the real need of becoming literate. The individual, however, perceives the symptom of an educational need as the real need.
- *Esteem Needs*—This refers to the adult student's need for a feeling of importance. Although esteem needs are not considered strictly educational needs, their importance in education has been well documented as a strong motivational force.



## Notes

## Collaborative Learning in Adult Education

One of the most frequently mentioned characteristics of adult learning is that it should be collaborative or participatory in nature. The following form the basis of collaborative learning:

- Both facilitators and students become active in the adult learning process
- The hierarchy between facilitators and students is eliminated
- A sense of community is created
- Knowledge is created, not transferred
- Knowledge is located within the community rather than within the individual

Collaborative learning assumes that communities of individuals socially, rather than individually, construct knowledge and that the shaping and testing of ideas is a process in which anyone can participate. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of common inquiry in learning, a process through which students begin to experience knowledge as something that is created rather than something that is transmitted from the facilitator or instructor to the student. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of the instructor to create a climate in which collaborative learning can occur. Three important elements to foster collaborative learning are:

- the environment
- the role of the facilitator
- the role of the students

Although the three are intertwined, they are discussed separately.

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## Notes



## **The Collaborative Learning Environment**

Collaborative learning can take place only in an environment in which students feel free to exchange ideas and share experiences in order to create knowledge. Therefore, the environment should be unthreatening and democratic, discouraging hostile competition as well as encouraging mutual respect for the ideas and opinions of others.

To create this environment, students must be willing to listen to and respect different points of view as well as tolerate different opinions, engage in discussion and conversation rather than speech making and debate, take on and exercise the authority relinquished by the facilitator, and develop a sense of commitment and responsibility to the group. In turn, facilitators must be willing to surrender authority for the learning process and become co-students with their students.

## **The Role of the Facilitator**

Although facilitators and students are jointly responsible for establishing the adult learning environment's activities, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to take the lead. One of the facilitator's most demanding tasks is "to assist in the development of a group culture in which adults can feel free to challenge one another and feel comfortable with being challenged." Without such an environment, collaborative learning cannot occur.

In collaborative learning, the instructor becomes a facilitator and enters into a process of mutual inquiry, relating to students as a knowledgeable co-student; authority, expertise, power, and control are redefined. Facilitators must develop methods of sharing their expertise without undermining the attempts of students to acquire their own.

In addition to taking the lead in establishing an appropriate environment for collaborative learning, the facilitator has other responsibilities, two of which are preparing students for collaborative work and planning for collaborative learning.

Not all adults are accustomed to collaborative learning situations, and facilitators have a responsibility to describe collaborative learning and provide a rationale for its use as well as any training needed to engage in it effectively. Facilitators also need to prepare students in terms of the content by providing them with a common framework and background from which to begin.

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## **Notes**

In planning for collaborative learning, the facilitator must consider where and how much of the learning activity collaboration is appropriate, establish and communicate clear objectives, use suitable techniques, prepare content materials, (including developing meaningful questions or problems for group work), structure groups, and provide a clear sense of expected outcomes of group work.

### **The Role of Students**

Collaborative learning also calls for significant role shifts for the student: from listener, observer, and note taker to problem solver, contributor, and participant. Facilitators can prepare students for these shifts in their roles, including the need to assume greater responsibility for their own learning.

### **Problems With Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning is not without problems and issues. Those most frequently mentioned include:

- cultural biases toward competition and individualism that frustrates collaboration
- traditional class structure frequently does not allow sufficient time for true collaboration to occur or for group members to establish trust and a sense of group security

### **Benefits of Collaborative Learning**

- Provides an environment for democratic planning, decision making, and risk taking
- Allows students to acquire insights into the potential and power of groups as well as develop their independence as students
- Helps individuals develop better judgment through the exposure and resolution of previously unshared biases
- Enables adults to draw on their previous experiences by tapping their reservoir of accumulated wisdom and knowledge

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### **Notes**

## Competencies for Instructors

Instructors are expected to possess and demonstrate professional competencies. The instructor competencies identified in this section are consistent with the instructor competencies used in the instructor training program of the Federal Highway Administration's training organization, the National Highway Institute. These competencies are a derivative of the 31 competencies developed by the American Society of Training Developers (ASTD) Models for Excellence study, and are congruent with the 14 instructor core competencies developed by the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI).

Instructors should demonstrate:

- Positive Behavior Modeling Skills
  - Demonstrate empathy
  - Maintain or enhance the self-esteem of the students
  - Respond to students in a non-threatening manner
  - Encourage involvement in class participation
  - Share feelings, thoughts, and rationale
  - Provide support without removing responsibility
- Communication Skills
  - Listen well
  - Be open to questions
  - Accept the background of others as valid experience

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## Notes

- The Ability to Summarize Information
  - Reflect upon and/or respond to issues that come up in class
  - Present skills using proper speaking voice, body language, and eye contact
- Learning Management Skills
  - Manage time
  - Prioritize material and change course directions to meet local need
  - Train during and under adverse conditions
  - Use humor effectively
  - Write or think on his or her feet
  - Don't use offensive jokes, language, or mannerisms
  - Use visual aids, such as computers, transparencies, videos, satellite transmission, flip charts, wall charts, complete projection equipments, slides, or other media
  - Help with current, specific questions, maybe at a break or after class
- Facilitation/Trainer Skills
  - Demonstrate good conflict resolution skills
  - Be able to control discussions and group dynamics
  - Give positive feedback and suggestions for improvement
  - Illustrate group brainstorming or problem solving processes
  - Use local classroom examples and apply them to the technical subject
  - Meet both the business and personal needs of the students
  - Use a variety of instructional methods and media

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## Notes

- The Application of Adult Learning Theory
  - Improve students' performance as a result of the training
  - Recognize the conditions under which adults learn best
  - Help others learn more effectively
  - Ask questions (same question more than one way)
  - Recognize group dynamics
  - Employ experiential learning
  - Use group activities for learning
  - Manage time when working with groups (exercises)
  - Encourage involvement in class
  - Use evaluations effectively
- Technical Skills
  - Be technically credible
  - Act as a resource
  - Share knowledge
  - Help students set up a network for future questions
  - Demonstrate technology and subject matter expertise

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## Notes

## Instructor Incompetencies

It is most important that instructors know and display the recognized professional competencies of the adult trainer. This section addresses some of the mistakes made by instructors that caused them to fail as credible instructors in the adult learning environment.

There are several ill-considered things trainers have been known to do:

- Failure to understand the organization's mission/goals
- Failure to involve the right people
- Becoming preoccupied in the latest techniques
- Overlooking engagement
- Training only because it is what is expected of them
- Failure to understand the organization's mission/goals—One of the most critical things that trainers forget to do is understand the objective. Trainers need to have organizational knowledge of the organization history, culture, mission and politics).
- Failure to involve the right people—Training is a support function. It exists to serve the needs of the entire organization, rather than just the training department.

Some ways to include the right people are as follows:

- Knowledge of the organization
- Supervisor involvement
- Recognition of people in the organization for their contributions to training success
- Involving the organization in celebrating training results

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## Notes

## Learning Tips for Effective Instructors

Instructors must remember that learning occurs within each individual as a continual process throughout life. People learn at different speeds, so it is natural for them to be anxious or nervous when faced with a learning situation.

There are four critical elements of learning that must be addressed to ensure that students learn. These elements are:

- *Motivation*—Instructors can motivate students in several ways:
  - *Set a feeling or tone for the lesson*—Instructors should try to establish a friendly, open atmosphere that shows the students they will help them learn.
  - *Set an appropriate level of concern*—The level of tension must be adjusted to meet the level of importance of the objective.
  - *Set an appropriate level of difficulty*—The degree of difficulty should be set high enough to challenge students, but not so high that they become overwhelmed.

In addition, students need specific knowledge of their learning results (feedback). Feedback must be specific, not general. Students must also see a reward for learning. Adults must see the benefit of learning in order to motivate themselves to learn the subject.

- *Reinforcement*—Reinforcement is a very necessary part of the teaching/learning process.

Positive reinforcement is normally used by instructors who are teaching students new skills. As the name implies, positive reinforcement is “good” and reinforces “good” (or positive) behavior.

Negative reinforcement is useful in trying to change modes of behavior. The result of negative reinforcement is *extinction*; that is, the instructor uses negative reinforcement until the “bad” behavior disappears, or it becomes extinct.

When instructors try to change behaviors (old practices), they should apply both positive and negative reinforcement.

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## Notes

- *Retention*—Students must retain information from classes in order to benefit from the learning. In order for students to retain the information taught, they must see a meaning or purpose for that information.

The amount of retention will be directly affected by the degree of original learning. Simply stated, if the students did not learn the material well, they will not retain it well either.

Retention by the students is directly affected by their amount of practice during the learning. Instructors should emphasize retention and application. After the students demonstrate correct (desired) performance, they should be urged to practice to maintain the desired performance.

- *Transference* is the ability to use the information taught in the course in a new setting.

Transference is most likely to occur in the following situations:

- *Association*—Students can associate the new information with something they already know.
- *Similarity*—The information is similar to material that students already know; that is, it revisits a logical framework or pattern.
- *Degree of original learning*—Student's degree of original learning was high.
- *Critical attribute element*—Information learned contains elements that are extremely beneficial.

## Treatment of Students

Students should be treated as people with years of experience and a wealth of information. Instructors should provide opportunities for dialogue within the group and tap their experience as a major source of enrichment to the class.

Most adults have established values, beliefs, and opinions. Respect should be demonstrated for differing beliefs, religions, value systems, and lifestyles. Students should know that they are entitled to their values, beliefs, and opinions, but that everyone in the room may not share their beliefs. Debate and challenge of ideas should be encouraged.

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## Notes



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Instructor Training Certification Course

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A variety of teaching strategies should be used, such as:

- Small group problem solving and discussion
- Auditory, visual, tactile, and participatory teaching

Most adults prefer teaching methods other than lecture.

Instructors should assess the specific learning needs of his or her audience before the class or at the beginning of the class. Presenting single concepts and focusing on application of concepts to relevant practical situations is important.

Frequent breaks should be given, even if they are two-minute breaks. During a lecture, a short break every 45 to 60 minutes is sufficient. In more interactive teaching situations, breaks can be spaced 60 to 90 minutes apart.

Support for the students as individuals protects their pride. Self-esteem and ego are at risk in a classroom environment that is not perceived as safe or supportive. Students will not ask questions or participate in learning if they are afraid of being put down or ridiculed. Students should be allowed to admit confusion, ignorance, fears, biases, and different opinions. All questions and comments are to be treated with respect. When someone asks a repetitive question, it is important to remember that the only *foolish* question is the unasked question.

Adults tend to have a problem-centered orientation to learning, and participatory activities help to enhance learning. Adults generally want to immediately apply new information or skills to current problems or situations.

**NOTE:** New information and skills should be relevant and meaningful to the concerns and desires of the students.

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Notes

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## Instructors As Leaders

When a person is placed in the position of instructor or teacher, they immediately assume a role as a leader. Although, to many, being a leader may seem to be a daunting task, as an instructor it is nothing more than being the person in charge, who continually provides the three tenets of classroom leadership: purpose, direction, and motivation. By providing these three principles, the students will begin to trust the instructor as a knowledgeable source.

*Purpose* is provided by constantly associating the training with the learner's background or what it is they desire out of the learning process. If the students are first responders, ensuring the training topics remain relevant to first responder tasks or attitudes provides purpose and relevance to the responder being trained. The students will want to learn what is being taught to them.

*Direction* is provided by keeping the students on track of the topic at hand and not allowing discussions to become arguments to stray too far away from the objective. Staying in charge of the class, while not being condescending or overly authoritative, will adequately address this topic. Additionally, being able to either answer questions of students or being able to find the answer provides a great deal of direction and helps adult learners feel more comfortable about the learning environment.

*Motivation* easily and logically ties into the first two tenets of classroom leadership. Providing motivation should be no challenge to an instructor. An instructor provides motivation by simply keeping the adult learner focused on the objective by continually stressing the importance and relevance of a desired outcome. Trainers must be cognizant of students becoming lackadaisical and especially frustrated by not performing a specific action to standard or as intended. Adult learners can become extremely defensive and no longer willing to participate in training when they feel their professional reputation may seem to be tested and will withdraw. It is the instructor's responsibility to not key in on what was done wrong, but what can be learned by what was done wrong.

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## Notes

It is also important to constantly remember that instructors are role models and students watch every move the instructor makes. Nothing goes unnoticed. When teaching adults to become instructors, keep in mind that the method in which everything is done in relation to instructing is most likely the way students will conduct their own training. The students will assume the instructor's identity, so to speak, and by doing so, will reflect where they were trained. As a representative of a training institution, it is important to uphold high standards, as it not only affects the reputation of the instructor, but the institution represented as well. In short—set the right example—always.

Throughout the adult learning environment/process, it is imperative that instructors are able to mentor and coach the adult learner through every situation, even ones that may not personally be thought of as necessary. Adults do not like to be put on the spot or embarrassed, and as an instructor, one must be able to craft the method of instruction in such a manner as to facilitate this process. Teaching adults can be the easiest thing in the world or the most troubling. Maybe constantly remembering how one would personally like to be taught might help a relatively new adult instructor stay on course.

## Instructor Ethics

As a leader in the classroom, the instructor is also responsible for conflict resolution, maintaining control of the class at all times, and ensuring that certain student-teacher boundaries are established and followed. It is important to impart on students the importance of ethics in the classroom and how they are related to the role of the instructor. Although it may seem unnecessary to discuss ethics, discussing how ethics is associated with a positive training environment isn't necessarily all that obvious.

How does one associate ethics with training? Ethics and leadership go hand in hand. Ethics and training are nothing more than a continuation of positive role-modeling by the instructor. A great example is this: if there is a test or an exam at the end of a course of instruction, should the instructor teach only the questions on the test, or should the instructor ensure that he/she has sufficiently taught the learning objectives, thereby teaching what the student should know, not only for the test, but in order to successfully achieve these objectives on their own—out of the classroom environment? Don't short change the student, because although the student and instructor may think he or she is doing the student a favor, in fact, the instructor is doing the students and their community a disfavor by not teaching to the standard. There may come a point in time when the student is faced with an example of what they could have learned in training, had the instructor given them the proper training, and lives are lost because ultimately all they knew were the answers to the questions of an objective test.

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## Notes

As an instructor, it is important to remember that one must always be as objective as possible, even when giving subjective evaluations or commentary. Personal feelings, positive or negative, must be curtailed as much as humanly possible in a learning environment. As stated before, students will see everything that instructors do, and they will certainly be able to see if one is being overly easy or hard on a student. Being consistent in training and evaluating will show through and make a very positive learning experience/environment for all involved.

Keeping in mind the basic concepts of the adult learning theory, understanding one's self and ensuring the students understand the boundaries in regard to the student-teacher relationship is definitive and must be followed at all times throughout the course of the particular training.

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